

[Review] Aina Gallego (2014) Unequal Political Participation Worldwide

Article (Accepted Version)

Tambe, Elvis Bisong (2017) [Review] Aina Gallego (2014) Unequal Political Participation Worldwide. Party Politics, 23 (5). pp. 605-606. ISSN 1354-0688

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/70301/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Aina Gallego, *Unequal Political Participation Worldwide*. Cambridge: University Press, 2015. \$95.00 (hbk), x + 235pp. ISBN 9781107023536.

Elvis Bisong Tambe, University of Sussex, UK.

Unequal Political Participation Worldwide, is a unique contribution by a young scholar to the ever-growing literature on electoral participation. The emphasis of the book, is explicitly directed to inequalities in participation that are linked to education (p. 14). In this regard, a widely supported notion in the existing literature suggests that well educated individuals are much more likely to turnout in elections than poorly educated citizens, thus indicating that one of the basic tenet of democracy being *one person, one vote* is completely violated as participation tends to be unequal. This claim therefore begs for an answer: *Is unequal participation universal?* Relying on a creative mixture of cross-national survey data which is buttressed by survey experiments, Gallego rebuff the general assertion that highly educated citizens turn to vote at higher rates by proposing this rather differs across countries and are dependent on a set of contextual features.

The book is divided into seven chapters. She begins the first two chapter by exploring the issues of definition, unfolding disparities of unequal participation across countries, setting out a general theoretical benchmark upon which the phenomenon of unequal participation could be understood, while also incorporating a debate as to why citizens tend to engaged in electoral politics. From chapter three to six, the book moved from been descriptive to verifying explanations and facts and finally chapter seven centre on the consequences of unequal participation for democratic societies.

Back to the principal argument of the book, Gallego contends *“to understand unequal participation, we should think about which characteristics of the context can effect highly and less educated individuals in heterogeneous ways. That is, contextual characteristics that affect the cognitive costs of voting should affect the propensity to vote of members of different groups heterogeneously”* (p. 195). The hypotheses for each of these contextual variables are then tested through bivariate, multivariate and survey experiments. The importance of Gallego’s findings are of course significantly determined by the quality upon which her evidence are constructed. First, she posits that the use of complex voting procedures such as: ballot structure and registration procedures are incline to increase and impose additional cost on citizens, most especially the cognitive cost of voting. An increase in this cognitive cost invariably reduces, lower and depresses the participation rates of poorly educated citizens who find it hard to understand the administrative hurdles connected with voting. On the other hand, the participation rates of highly educated individuals is not in any way affected.

Second, government fragmentation (coalition government) is argue to be another predictor of unequal participation. While highly educated citizens may find it easy to learn about likely coalition, the position of the partners and the likely results of negotiations, this may be very challenging for poorly educated people. Her empirical result reveals that coalition government does lower participation rates and results in larger turnout inequality.

Third, media system and ease access to political information is another contextual variable that is posited to profoundly shape level of political awareness and of course unequal participation. Public service oriented media system are associated with smaller participatory gaps, this is not true with private service media. Fourth, she examines whether trade unions do or do not affect turnout inequality. Her main contention is that while trade unions increases voter participation, they may not affect turnout inequality much.

Finally, the relationship between income inequality and turnout inequality is equally advance. Her results are quite surprising, showing that turnout gaps due to both education and income are, on average larger in countries where income inequality before taxes and transfer are high. On the other hand, income inequality after taxes and transfer seems to be weak or non-existent.

Regardless of the results that are presented, nevertheless, there are some weakness. At first glance Gallego's book is titled: *Unequal Political Participation Worldwide*. However one quickly realise that a good number of her cases are from older or Western advanced democracies in Western Europe (16) and North America (2). Followed by post-Communists countries (8), which I argue are much more similar to Western European democracies, South America (4), Asia (4) and Oceania (2). While no electoral democracies in Africa are included. Understanding unequal participation in new emerging democracies has yet to receive significant attention and the book fall short of this by virtue of the fact that a large number of her cases are drawn from industrial democracies in Western Europe. It will therefore be suitable had Gallego run her analysis on other datasets such as Afrobarometer, Latino barometer or Asia barometer in order to access the reliability of her results. Furthermore, she also fail to report some of her results and finally her drive to pool both survey experiments and cross-national survey data is found wanting and limited to a few contextual variables. Regardless of the aforementioned critiques, still, Gallego has written a very good book. Her theorisation and the combination of observational data which is reinforced by survey experiments is nothing but novel and impressive. Also, her empirical results are neatly presented hence making the book a must read.